

THE REAL JESUS
A Series on the Book of Mark
“The Great I AM”
Mark 6:45-56
New City Church of LA
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I. Vision of New City

Happy New Year and Welcome to New City.

I want to start off the New Year at New City by looking at our vision statement together. [Read vision statement]

There are two things we say in our vision statement: what we want to BE and what we want to DO.

We seek to BE an inclusive, gospel-centered community of lovers of Jesus Christ. To be inclusive means to be a come-as-you-are church.

- Where blacks, whites, Latinos, Asians can come as we are;
- Where loft dwellers and skid row residents can come as we are;
- Where gays and straights can come as we are;
- Where people who are religious and irreligious can come as we are—NOT because of our common affinity but because of our common brokenness and need for redemption.

To be an inclusive church means we are not a church that pretends. It's a place where you can come and be real. It's a place where we can drop our masks not because everyone is okay (your okay and I'm okay) but because we are all messed up together, because neither of us are okay. We are all broken. Even if we look like we are all put together, we are as messed up inside as the next guy who looks like he's struggling. When we get to the depth of our hearts, there is darkness in everyone of us. There is emptiness in us. We are broken. But, we also come to the realization that God loves us more than we can ever imagine. He loves us unconditionally. He accepts us unconditionally through Jesus Christ. This is the bond that holds us. It's our common brokenness and common acceptance by God, despite our brokenness. It's the gospel of

grace. That's why we are not just an inclusive church; we are an inclusive gospel-centered community of lovers of Jesus Christ.

The second part of our vision statement states what we DO:

We connect people to God. We celebrate God's love and grace and seek to bring people into a relationship with God.

We grow together in community.

We serve the city because God loves the city. We are not here to use the city for our benefit, but to serve the city.

We extend God's kingdom. We want to be a movement of church planting in urban Los Angeles and beyond.

Connect, grow, serve, and extend. That's what we DO.

As we inaugurate this new year, it is my prayer that we will make a big movement towards this vision God has given us.

II. Introduction

We're in the middle of a series called THE REAL JESUS. We've been going through the Book of Mark a passage at a time. Mark is the first book written about the life of Jesus. It is written by eyewitnesses. Second century authority tells us that Mark wrote this based on Peter's account of Jesus. So, this is pretty reliable stuff. We know it was written in the first century within 20-30 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. This is not like the stuff that's being discovered now—you hear about it in Discovery Channel—about the lost letter of Judas or Book of Thomas, and stuff like that. It is agreed by most scholars that all of these other accounts of Jesus were written in late second century or third century. They were not written by eye-witnesses. That's why it is so important. Scholars who argue for these other books admit that Mark was written in mid first century. So, this stuff is just a lot more credible than others.

So, who do Book of Mark claim Jesus is? Does he say, Jesus was a great rabi who taught good moral teachings? No. Does he say that Jesus was a prophet like the OT prophets? No. That's what is taught in Israeli schools. Does he say that Jesus was a god among many who did great miracles? No. There is no way because Jews were and continues to be monotheists. Does he say that Jesus is the God, the creator of the

universe, the same God that they worship. This would be the most difficult thing for a first century to Jews to believe—that a man could be God. That would be absolute blasphemy! But, somehow they came to believe that. How? Today's passage is reaching the climax of that question.

Read Mark 6:45-56

Note the need for solitary time with God.

This passage tells us: (1) our tendencies; (2) how Jesus responds to us; and (3) what this reveals about who Jesus really is.

III. First, About Our Tendencies.

When the evening came, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and Jesus was alone on land, praying and communing with God. He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. It wasn't a deadly situation, but it was hard. They just had a supernatural experience of the power and providence of God when Jesus miraculously fed 10,000 people. Now, they couldn't even cross a lake without straining. The wind was against them. They were at it all night.

Sometimes, we are straining at the oars when the wind is against us. We are trying to go in one direction, but it just doesn't seem to work. Nothing is going right.

For some of us, we are struggling with depression or hurts and pains and we are trying to get on but the wind is against us. We try to snap out of it, but there is a strong wind against us.

Some of us are trying to get off an addiction. We are straining at the oars but the wind is against us. There are drug dealers. There are temptations. There are friends. There is something inside of us that pushes against us even though we have a deep desire for sobriety.

Some of us have been trying hard to find a job, get into a school, an occupation, get a place to stay, but the wind is against us. It was hard before the recession started and now, the wind has gotten stronger.

Some of us are lonely. We have been trying to find that someone special but we feel like the wind is against us. It's not working out and we wonder if we will ever meet that someone who will love us for who we are.

The wind is against us and we're struggling.

It was Jesus who made the disciples get in the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida. They were doing what Jesus wanted them to do. But, they still struggled.

Even after we experience the guidance of Jesus and start the journey that he told us to go on, we still experience turbulence. Just because it is God's will doesn't mean everything is going to be rosy. This passage is Exhibit A in support of that reality.

Many times, God's road is more difficult, more daring, more straining, more opposed, than going with everyone else.

Planting a multi-ethnic, multi-socioeconomic gospel-centered church in downtown LA is something that God told us to do; but, I know just because he told us to do it doesn't mean it's going to be easy. In 2009, we are going to face difficulties, we are going to be straining (some of you are going to feel tired), and at times, we are going to feel like the wind is against us.

For some of you, when things get difficult, you feel like going back to the old way, which is the easy way. Maybe that old way for you is the life of substance abuse, moral relativism, the life of giving up, the life of negativity, the life where you are going no where, the life before you committed your life to Jesus.

IV. WHEN you feel like the disciples, when you feel like you are straining the oars against the wind, I want you to hear now, hear in your heart, hear in your soul how our Lord Jesus responds to you. So, the second point: How Jesus responds to our tendencies.

It says in verse 49, "He saw." Do you think the disciples knew that Jesus saw them? Probably not. They were consumed by the struggles they were facing. Whether or not they knew that Jesus saw them, the reality is that Jesus saw and knew of their situation.

Do you know that Jesus sees your straining? He sees your struggles. He sees your difficulties.

He didn't just see them, he goes to them. You might be wondering how God is going to come. There is no way. There is no boat. We so easily calculate our chances based purely on our circumstances and how much we can strain at the oars. I am so like that. I often limit God to what I can do. For the last couple of weeks, I feel convicted that God has been speaking to me and telling me that what he is going to do at New City is not going to be limited by what I can do or what our people can do. It is He who is going to build this church and we better make sure we sign on to his plans and agendas. He can do stuff I can't imagine. Here, He walks on water. He'll do anything to get to us.

We might not see HOW God is going to do what He is going to do, but we shouldn't limit what God can do based on what we can do.

V. **What Does His Response Reveal About Who He Really Is: About Who the Real Jesus Is.**

Back to the story: verse 48: "About the fourth watch of the night (which is about 3-6am) he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass them, but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, because they all saw him and were terrified. Immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down."

Now, why does it say that Jesus was about to pass by them? It couldn't be that Jesus was going to actually pass them by and not help them (and maybe surprise them on the other side), because according to verse 48, he started to walk on water in the first place because he saw the disciples struggling. Why does Mark tell us that Jesus was about to pass them by?

Jesus is intentionally trying to reveal who he is: This phrase: to pass by in Greek is *parerchomai*. The verb occurs in two key passages in the Greek translation of the OT:

In Exodus 33, when Moses asked God to show him his glory, God responds by **passing** before him and proclaiming his identity. In Exodus 33:19, it says: "And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you...." In 22, it says: "when my glory passes by...." In 34:6 says: "he (God) passed in front of Moses . . ."

Then, in 1 Kings 19:11-12, the LORD tells Elijah to stand on the mountain, “for the LORD is about to pass by.”

So, these passages tell us that when God wanted to reveal himself to human beings, he passed by them; and in the same way, Jesus passed by them because he wanted to reveal that he is the LORD Almighty.

This gets even more crystallized when we read on.

When the disciples saw Jesus, what Jesus said to them is absolutely amazing! It is translated: “It is I.” But, literally, they are the Greek words, *ego emi*—which literally means I AM. He is saying Don’t be afraid, I AM. Take courage, I AM.

This, as some of you know, is the name of God that was revealed to Moses. Jesus is revealing who he is to the disciples. Mark understands this and clearly accentuates this in the way he tells the story.

If you go back to Exodus 3, remember the burning bush scene? If you have not read it, they made a movie out of it: The Ten Commandments or Prince of Egypt. Moses is tending his sheep. He sees a burning bush. God calls him: Moses, Moses, take off your sandals for this is holy ground. God says: I have **seen** the misery of my people. He **saw**. Then, he tells Moses to go. Moses is very reluctant: “Who am I, that I should go.” God doesn’t take try to convince Moses and give him a pep talk. He doesn’t do the Tony Robbins thing and says, “Moses, you gotta believe in yourself, you gotta visualize this, you gotta actualize your potential, you gotta say to yourself, ‘I am somebody.’” He doesn’t. God says in the next verse, “I will be with you.”

Then, Moses says, “Suppose I go ...” Seems like he’s not really sure yet. “What if they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ What shall I tell them?”

And God says to Moses, “I AM.” Moses probably wanted God to finish his sentence there. I am ... what? “I am who I am.” This is an amazing name. This is God’s name. His name declares that He is unchanging, constant, unending, always present, always God ... I AM.

God was telling Moses: I AM the center of everything, I AM running the show, I AM the same yesterday, today, forever, I AM the Lord, I AM the creator of all things, including you, I AM more than enough, I AM sufficient, I AM God, I AM.

And, this is the most cherished name, the most honored name of God. In Greek, it is *ego emi*. And **that** is what Jesus said **HE** is. He said that I AM. Do not be afraid, I AM. Take courage, I AM.

Do you remember Mark 4:35 started this section of Mark regarding the miracles of Jesus. It started with the first storm. When Jesus calmed the storm, the disciples asked: “who is this? Even the wind and waves obey him?” And now, there is the second story of a storm and Jesus answers the question: *ego emi*—I AM.

He is the Great I Am who has seen our misery, has come down, and revealed his identity as the Lord God Almighty The I AM!

Why is it SO important that Jesus is this I AM who is everything? Who is worthy. Who is almighty. Who is everlasting. Who is holy. Who is sovereign. Who is immutable, unchangeable. Who is wonderful. Who is powerful. Who is the creator. Why is this SO important.

Because this I AM came down and humbled himself and came to us. That’s why it is so important. This God is not just a God who is way out there but he is here with us. He is Immanuel, which means God with us! Jesus was in perfect communion with the Father as he was in communion here in the mountain, and when he saw our struggles just as he saw the struggles of his disciples, he came down. God came down. God came down.

I want us to know that God sees our struggles, our straining, our going against the wind. So, he came down. Jesus is not an ordinary person who taught us how to live a good life. He is God himself who came to rescue us from our struggles, our problems, our pits. How does he rescue us? By coming down and being I AM.

His mere presence rescued them. It is not about God coming down and bring us material blessings, or blessings of relationships, or blessings of this or that, although those are good things he does bring. He comes down and brings us the blessings of Him, the blessings of knowing him.

And knowing that the Great I AM has come down to earth is a powerful thing.

- My life is a struggle: I AM
- I feel like I am spinning in a circle: I Am
- There is a wind against me: I Am

- I can't seem to make things work no matter how hard I try: I Am
- I am completely out of control: I Am
- I don't think I can make ends meet: I Am
- I need help: I Am
- I need a drink, a fix: I Am
- I am so loney: I Am
- I am dying: I Am the Life; I Am the Resurrection
- I don't know where to go: I Am the Way
- I don't know who to believe: I Am the Truth
- I am so hungry: I Am the Bread of Life
- Who can I follow: I Am the Good Shepherd
- I am trapped in darkness: I am the Light of the World
- I AM creator of the universe who loves you so much that I came down to die for you on the cross, to bear your sins, to be punished for your sins, so that you can have life in me. So that you can enjoy my presence in your life. So that you will be saved and rescued!